

Gramercy-raw notes

I enjoyed most of my youth on Gramercy Blvd in Houston.

From Howard Chalmers: some random, initial "Gramercy" thoughts and responses. This should stimulate some comments or questions for later written or telephone communications.

1. We passed through ABQ last year and commented to Mary (my spouse of 42+ years) that I wondered if you were still living in the area. So when your letter arrived yesterday, she reminded me that Mom had spoken to her often about the Blackledge family, recalling with respect and fondness of our great lives on Gramercy.
2. No, I haven't ever attempted to summarize my childhood, possible because I am still experiencing it. Might be a good idea, though. You might be the inspiration I need.
3. I did not remember the string communication system across Gramercy till you mentioned it. I do remember the effort, but can't recall if it worked or not. Seventy yards of string and a couple of juice cans had inherent "communication difficulties" written all over the effort.
4. I did remember Pete's accompanying Roddy (Rodney Neal) a few times on weekend to our 100-acre "ranch" near Tomball north of Houston and we did shoot shotguns, .22s and even deer rifles from time to time. But we more likely came across water moccasins than rattle snakes, or skunks instead of armadillos.
5. I also recall seemingly endless, touch football games on the then-vacant lot next door to the Slavin's house. I also recall the disappointment when Abe Murr and family built that strange, 1-story house on our playground.
6. I recall the other kids on the Gramercy block - Frankie Burdett (sisters Nancy and Bonnie), Frank Kelly (sister Carolyn), Carl and Chris Faught (sister Melanie).
7. I also remember the first set of twins I had known - Patti and Penny, who were the first college girls I knew, and my first friends to marry (Chuck and Fred).
8. I also recall that your Mother was the first adult I knew to pursue her own higher education after her family had become sufficiently far along in theirs. Very impressive!

9. I remember when you were the first in the Gramercy Gang to get transportation – the Renault, and that you became the only friend that Mom and Dad would let me ride with. Heaven forbid my riding with Frankie in his hot rod, Willys Jeep.
10. I remember the Saturday evening walks to Rice Stadium for 50-cent end zone seats to see Jess Neely, King Hill, Frank Ryan and the Owls. And more important, to Autry Court for the Southwest Conference Pre-Season Basketball Tourney during Thanksgiving season.
11. My strongest Blackledge-Chalmers memory, however, came when Captain Blackledge took me and you, and Roddy and Pete deep-sea fishing in the Rockport area. After a sleepless night, we five crowded on a cabin cruiser and ventured out on the rough and rolling Gulf to catch whales. As I recall, we stopped first near an off-shore oil platform, just as a worker threw a bucket of fish parts or something gross not too far from our boat. Shortly thereafter, you or Pete caught the first fish, and in the process of reeling it in, someone became seriously seasick. And, that started a chain reaction that had Mike, Pete and Roddy hanging overboard for the rest of the voyage. Somehow, I did not get sick, but neither did a catch anything. Vivid, wonderful memories of horrible circumstances. I always, respected your Dad for suppressing his desire to laugh aloud as the scene unfolded around this Navy veteran.

Before I conclude, just a brief Chalmers family update:

- My mother Pat and father Presley, had they lived, would each have turned 100 this year. We lost Dad to heart failure when he was 88 and Mom to Alzheimer's at age 94.
- Mary and I have never had children. She worked for years as a travel agent and meeting/event planner. My CV reveals that I apparently never had a real job.
- Roddy and Marilyn have two married daughters and a total of 11 grandchildren. One son-in-law is a B-2 Bomber pilot based in northern Missouri. Roddy was with Texas Parks & Wildlife for 30 years –25 as a Game Warden and 5 as an Instructor at the Game Warden Academy in Austin. Now living in Utopia TX, he has just been elected to his third, 4-year term as a Bandera County Constable.
- Mike and wife Beth, a formerly a prominent neuropsychologist specializing in dementia-related illnesses, live in retirement in San Antonio.

I'm sure this will start a long exchange of memories. I hope so.

Howard

Yes, that deep sea fishing expedition! I recall that the 4 of us were all bunked in one room, and were horseplaying, having pillow fights until my Dad suddenly appeared at the door, quite upset with us. "**Knock it off!** You kids quiet down! We're getting up early tomorrow!"

And we were awakened at something like 4:30 am and taken to a diner for pancakes. Pancakes at 4:30 am! what a bad idea! But I dutifully ate 'em, and that's what I lost later on the boat ... I remember the location as Port Aransas.

On the string communication, I think we were ahead of Verizon on this, except the weight of the string, and whatever we clipped to it to send over to the other house, kept dipping down into the flight path of any cars on Gramercy.

I think your Mom came thru ABQ one time, and went to my wife Helen's Antique Manor, and left some info, but somehow we lost that contact.

Now ... what about Bug Goldson?

I don't remember hearing about your spanking as a result of the Chalmers outing transgression. But, I vaguely remember hearing that your Dad was less than pleased.

Re: why you didn't visit the ranch? I think Dad didn't purchase the Tomball property until around 1959, so you were probably already in the process of transitioning to USNA. I'd guess that Pete's story took place after I headed to UT in 1961, which is probably why I hadn't heard about the armadillo.

H

PS By the way, a little armadillo lore. I know from personal experience that they won't stop while being chased unless they find their den. And, it is nearly impossible to pull an armadillo out of its hole - its feet and claws hold on to sides and tail is almost impossible to grip. And, I can't imagine Mom and Dad allowing Pete to transport the creature back to Houston. I wonder if they knew? Alternative Memories, perhaps?

I am still noodling on the Boog Goldston issue. I asked Roddy about his recollection, and he said

"I remember that Mom told us to stay away from Bug Goldson, that he was "not a good boy" (or something to that effect)." That's what you thought his name was - and, I think I would go with the memories of two great minds. So, with a score at 2-to-1, I'd spell it Bug Goldson till further notice. (Maybe I am thinking of Orioles great Boog Powell!)

I asked Roddy about the fishing excursion, to which he replied:

"I remember the deep-sea fishing trip. I think this was the only one I went on, 'cause I spent the entire time hanging over the side of the boat and "feeding the fish" with recycled breakfast!"

The fishing trip to Aransas Pass. One more memory -

After the fish parts (chum) were dumped from the oil platform into the water, I hooked a good-sized Skipjack, my only fish of the outing, and began reeling it in to the boat. Just before I got it close enough to net it, a large shark surfaced and hit my fish, cutting off its body just behind the gills. So, my only catch of the day turned out to be a fish head. The boat captain said it would have been 4 ½-5 feet long, if the shark hadn't decided to have it for breakfast. (P.S. I am fairly certain that was my first and last catch on what was probably my last fishing trip.)

Re Boog Goldston.

You are likely right about where he lived, and your explanation reveals facts that are new to me. Not surprised that (or why) Mom discouraged our dealings with him.

FYI, Roddy is 3 years younger than I, which makes him a year or so older than Pete.

Re Carl Faught name.

Pretty certain about the names Carl, Chris and Melanie. Their father owned the Faught Insurance Agency. I believe Carl was a bit older than I was and Chris was a bit older than Roddy, so we were not really close.

And, I don't recall your confrontation or my role as a referee. Wonder if that was my introduction to dispute resolution.

More later...

Yes, that deep sea fishing expedition! I recall that the 4 of us were all bunked in one room, and were horseplaying, having pillow fights until my Dad suddenly appeared at the door, quite upset with us. "Knock it off! You kids quiet down! We're getting up early tomorrow!"

Your memory is very accurate. And I do remember the pancakes being blamed for the seasickness.

And we were awakened at something like 4:30 am and taken to a diner for pancakes. Pancakes at 4:30 am! what a bad idea! But I dutifully ate 'em, and that's what I lost later on the boat ... I remember the location as Port Aransas.

Rockport didn't sound right to me, but it might have been Aransas Pass. I remember a motel across the highway from the beach or shoreline, and several years ago, when I did some consulting work in Port Aransas, I couldn't find the "right setting" in Port A for our fishing adventure. I made it a point to look.

On the string communication, I think we were ahead of Verizon on this, except the weight of the string, and whatever we clipped to it to send over to the other house, kept dipping down into the flight path of any cars on Gramercy.

Again, I couldn't recall how we used the string communication - tight string between two cans or hand-over-hand pulley effect - but what you say makes sense now. I seem to remember a passing car slowing abruptly.

I think your Mom came thru ABQ one time, and went to my wife Helen's Antique Manor, and left some info, but somehow we lost that contact.

42 years is great. I will have to meet Mary, she must have a great sense of humor to have enjoyed your company that long. Helen died in March 2006, just a few months prior to our 40th anniv.; I met Bonnie in Apr 2007 (the widow of a USNA classmate of mine, he died in Nov 2005, so I tell everyone I met Bonnie at her husband's funeral ... almost true.). Bonnie and I married in July 2010.

You would get a kick out of Mary.

What was your classmate's name? Do you remember that one of my best friends since 1955 was also a classmate of yours at USNA - Larry Graham, of Hunt/Kerrville. He played football, rowed for Navy's crew, and competed for USA in the Olympics (Rowing). Also, Larry was in UDT in San Diego when he was named to head Seal Team One.

Now ... what about Bug Goldson?

OK. I'm blocking o this one and your memory might be clearer. Where did he live, on the west side of the vacant lot, perhaps? I kinda remember a Boog (spelling is more distinctive, perhaps short for Booger) Goldston. Mom didn't encourage a friendship for some reason.

- Mike



Michael
Blackledge <mike@blackledge.com>

Apr 30 (7 days
ago)

to me, Howard

Howard, you're good at this - you should have been in Public Relations!

OK, I'm going with Aransas Pass in the book. Perhaps Cameron Iron Works knew about this location for chartering a deep sea fishing boat, as I recall either before, or perhaps from our intrepid trip, Dad brought home some "ling" - a white fish I had never heard of before or since, but Wiki tells me it is basically cod. I recall them being 'big' like 50 lbs.

Boog Goldston might be closer. I recall him living on your side of Gramercy, but a couple of houses beyond Frank Kelly. My brother Pete is 6 years younger than I, and I think Roddy is about 4 years younger than you? Well, Boog or Bug would lead Pete astray; they even got into breaking into people's homes - really unknown in our time and our neighborhood. So your Mom did well to encourage you not to solicit friendship with Bug. (Our Dad would refer to him as "Bugs" and I had to remind him that it was not plural, like Bugs Moran of Chicago/Prohibition infamy).

Do you have the Carl Faught name correct? I recall I got into my first 'real' fight with Carl, and you (I think) announced afterward that it was 'a draw' as I bloodied Carl's nose, and he left me crying!

I'm almost over it ...